

# Alcohol and Nutrition

Alcohol can have a significant impact on nutritional status, health, and weight. Overconsumption of alcohol may lead to nutrient deficiencies and weight gain. Long-term overconsumption may increase your risk for developing chronic conditions such as liver disease, high blood pressure, and coronary heart disease. Overconsumption of alcohol in combination with high-calorie foods can quickly lead to unwanted weight gain.

## How does alcohol affect my weight?

Everyone's body has a set number of calories necessary to maintain weight. The number is based on several factors such as sex, height, weight, body composition, and activity level.

Alcohol alone contains 7 calories per gram. Since one drink contains 14 grams of ethanol at 7 calories per gram, one serving of alcohol contains about 98 calories ( $14\text{g} \times 7\text{cal/g} = 98\text{cal}$ ). Other drinks that mix wine or distilled spirits with juices or other beverages have even more calories.

Calories from alcohol are often referred to as empty calories, meaning that your body cannot use these calories for energy like it can with protein, carbohydrates, and fat. In addition, alcohol is a toxin that your liver must metabolize before it can work on any food you have eaten. This compounds the effects of consuming high-calorie foods with alcohol.

Alcohol may also stimulate food intake and increase feelings of hunger. One study showed a 20 percent increase in calories eaten at a meal when alcohol was consumed before beginning to eat. There was a total caloric increase of 33 percent when the calories from the alcohol were added. Since alcohol provides many calories in a small volume, these additional calories can very easily contribute to weight gain over a short amount of time.

## How can alcohol lead to nutrient deficiencies?

Many people are aware that overconsumption of alcohol can cause weight gain; however, nutrient deficiencies may occur over time when alcohol starts to replace nutrient-dense foods in the diet. Malnutrition is a common concern among long-term alcoholics. The effects of long-term malnutrition may include liver disease, pancreatitis, and increased risk for some cancers.

## Can alcohol be good for me in moderation?

Some studies have shown that moderate consumption of alcohol (1 to 2 drinks per day) may have some health benefits. Other studies (on those over the age of 30) suggest that some alcoholic beverages, red wine in particular, may lower blood pressure and levels of LDL, or bad, cholesterol levels, reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. These beneficial effects, however, may also be gained from a healthy lifestyle, including a diet low in fat and high in physical activity. It is also of note that the antioxidants and phytochemicals in red wine may also be found in red grapes and red grape juice.

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